

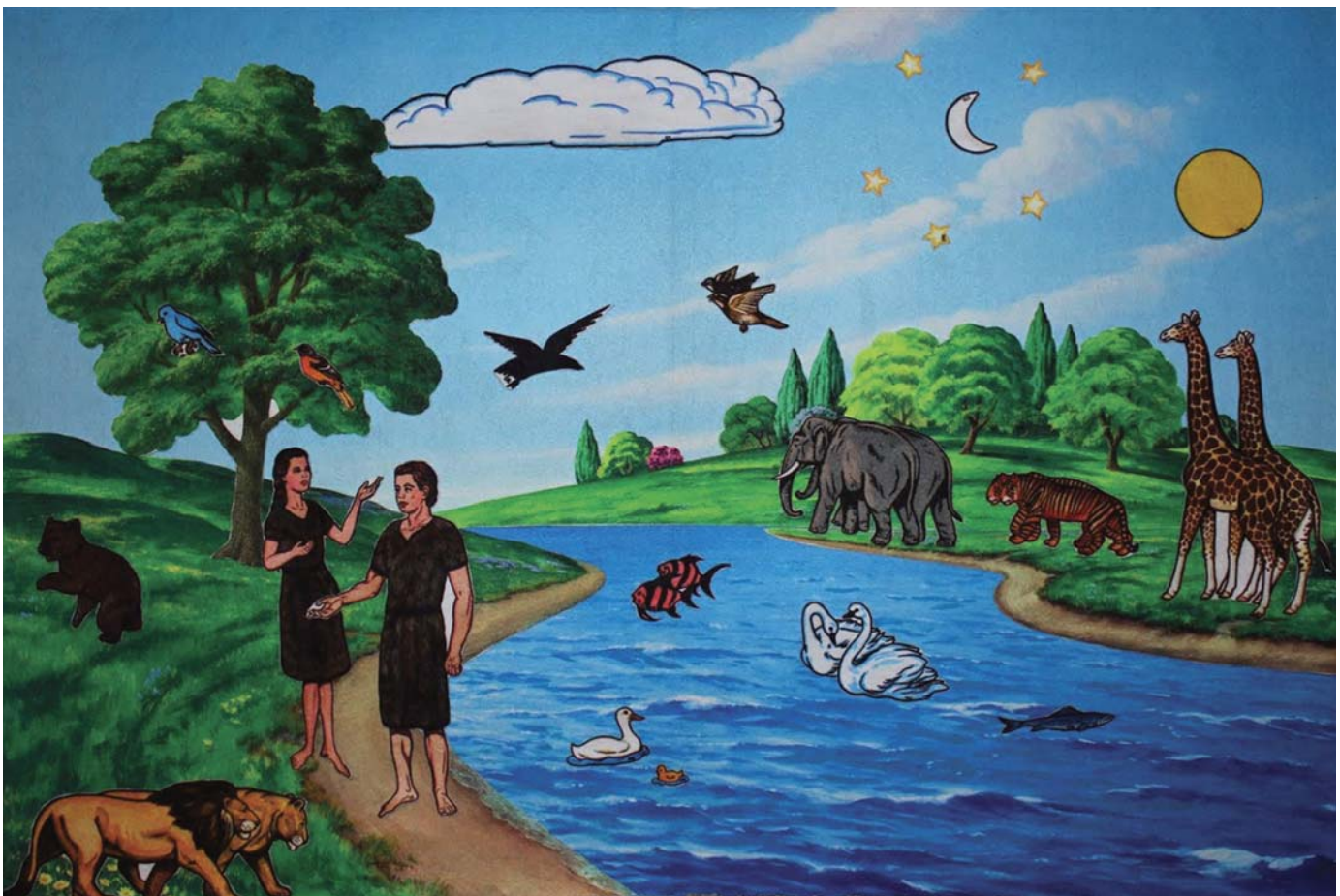
## Interview: *The Story Behind the Bible Felts* | BY ALITA BYRD

**D**o you remember the felt board from your childhood Sabbath School? Betty Lukens has been creating felts to illustrate Bible stories for children for over sixty years, and still ships the sets all over the world. In this interview, she explains the genesis of the felt stories and how they have evolved over time.

**Question:** *Generations of kids have grown up learning Bible stories from felt characters placed on felt boards, made by Betty Lukens. How did the Betty Lukens felts come to be? Can you tell us the story? Did it all start with your mother?*

**Answer:** Yes, the original concept of creating a visual aid for teaching the Bible stories started with my mother, Marie Lukens, over sixty years ago. She was very much involved with teaching children about Jesus, and in teaching Sabbath School. One day she said to me, "I am going to create a set that illustrates every story in the Bible." And to make a long story short—we did.

There were days and weeks and months of creating artwork and writing the stories and cataloguing the pieces into a set. The set evolved over time as well. We now have beautiful colors and detail in the felt pieces



that have come with newer technology in our manufacturing process; the original felt sets were very plain-looking. In the end, we have one of the best visual-aid resources you can find for teaching Bible stories to children in a classroom or home setting. We have people that call in to buy a felt set and will tell us they remember using the felts at church when they were younger, and now they want them to teach their children.

**Question:** *The Through the Bible felt set contains 600 figures and objects and can be used to tell hundreds of Bible stories from the Old and New Testaments. How many of these sets do you sell around the world every year? How many have been sold overall?*

**Answer:** The set containing 600 figures is the complete Bible in felt, which tells 182 lessons from Genesis to Revelation. We sell around 1,000 sets each year, to locations all over the world. As far as how many sold overall, that number would be a guess—maybe 20,000 sets in total?

**Question:** *And so the Bible felts have changed over time?*

**Answer:** There was one major revision about twenty-five years ago where we updated the stories and improved and added some felt figures. But for the last twenty-five years, the set has seen very few changes. We have added some different scenes and backgrounds, but the original 600 pieces have remained virtually unchanged. So much planning and detail went into creating the set that it really hasn't needed much improvement as time has passed.

**Question:** *How did the images in the felts originate? Who drew them?*

**Answer:** We worked mainly with two different artists: Clyde Provansha and Jim Arribito.

**Question:** *Where are the felts manufactured?*



**Answer:** We do our manufacturing in California, not too far from where we started many years ago.

**Question:** *The felts are still sold on a “sheet” and must be cut out, correct? Isn’t that a time-consuming process for customers? Could this change at some point?*

**Answer:** Yes, we compare the cutting of felt to an act of love. The best way to create the bright and colorful colors is using a complex printing process. We have to use a large sheet of felt during that process—we cannot print the pieces individually. Pre-cutting the felt sets has been a topic of conversation in our office for many years now. We will hopefully find the right type of technology that will help us do this one day in the near future.

**Question:** *You also sell some non-Bible story felts, such as farm animals, dolls that can be dressed up, the planets, and other educational items. Who designed these felts? How long have they been available?*

**Answer:** All of these sets were designed and created by me, using different artists over time. We have been selling these other educational items for about 12–15 years now.

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**Question:** *And you also sell some felts that represent early Adventist history?*

**Answer:** Yes, there is a set for Ellen White, and we also have a set that teaches Daniel and Revelation.

**Question:** *Are most customers Adventist? Or are the felts just as popular among other Bible-believing Christians? Do you market to other churches?*

**Answer:** The stories, especially children's stories, from the Bible are popular among most Bible-believing Christian churches. We sell many sets to interdenominational churches, as well as Adventist churches.

**Question:** *Are felts becoming less popular as teachers and parents have greater access to other resources online, etc? Have sales decreased over time?*

**Answer:** Yes and no. We have seen technology change our culture here in America in a dramatic way in the last 10–20 years. You can now

obtain a copy of the Bible on your cell phone, which you carry around with you at all times.

There is definitely a group of people that view felts as old-fashioned and an old technology, but not as many as you would think. You can use a computer screen to show an animation of figures, but it is not a direct replacement for something you can hold and touch and feel. Children are still fascinated by felts, and they love to hold them and play with them.

Also, the internet has transformed the reach we now have. We are selling more sets internationally than ever before. Most people around the world have access to the internet, and therefore they can view our products online and order them in that format.

**Question:** *Where are the felts most popular?*

**Answer:** We sell felt Bible sets to all corners of the world. We still sell more sets in the United States than internationally, but there are many that ship to Europe, South America, Canada, Australia, and some into Asia.

**Question:** *What are your goals for the Betty Lukens felt company? What does the future hold?*

**Answer:** Only the Lord truly knows the answer to this question. I want to continue following his plan for my life. I hope to continue manufacturing materials that will teach children about Jesus—the same mission my mother had over sixty years ago. She was a great woman, and the Lord did an amazing work through her that I want to continue.

**Question:** *I understand you are semi-retired. What are your plans?*

**Answer:** You are never retired if you are doing the Lord's work. I am spending a little less time in the office these days, but I want to focus more on missions—working with people to get these felt sets into the hands of people around the world in remote areas. I want to make sure they reach people who have the desire to teach children about Jesus, but not the resources. ■



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